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Tapping the Potential of EL Paraprofessionals through Ongoing Professional Development

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Abstract

Many paraprofessionals provide instructional support to English Learners (ELs), yet little research exists regarding their preparedness. Research on paraprofessionals in special education suggests that paraprofessionals are often under-prepared for their responsibilities. This paper explores ongoing professional development (PD) for paraprofessionals using findings from a study of the first year of a 5-year PD initiative for 109 paraprofessionals who worked with ELs in a high-poverty, high-minority urban district. Study findings are derived from the analysis of 57 participant reflection journals, interviews with 12 paraprofessional participants, a focus group with six PD providers, and de-identified observation and focus group data provided by the project's external evaluator. We found that paraprofessionals wanted to be valued for their skills and were often frustrated by inconsistent work schedules. We also found that paraprofessionals learned useful strategies for working with ELs, yet few paraprofessionals actually reported implementing these strategies with students, suggesting the need for ongoing PD that includes teachers with paraprofessionals. Our findings have implications for any system that utilizes the services of paraprofessionals of ELs.

Introduction

According to Uro and Barrio (2013), English learners (ELs) continue to be the fastest growing student population in U.S. schools, and it is projected that this diverse population of students will continue to grow. Regardless of geographical location, schools can anticipate an increase in EL enrollment (Berube, 2002). Unfortunately many schools do not meet the needs of ELs, which is illustrated by the large gap in standardized test scores (Fry, 2008) and higher drop-out rates (Fry, 2010). Yet these statistics are not inevitable. Research shows that ELs are more likely to achieve academically when schools provide well-planned, high-quality programs that foster the acquisition of academic language and provide access to grade level content support the academic success of ELs (National High School Center, 2009).

Paraprofessionals, who may also be referred to as teaching assistants or teachers' aides, are often integral to high quality programs for ELs. Paraprofessionals support the instruction of the classroom teacher, often working with small groups of students who have individualized education plans (IEPs) or who are designated as limited English proficient. Paraprofessionals of

ELs often share the culture and language of their students. They are on the instructional frontlines working side by side with ELs, sometimes having more direct contact with ELs and their families than do other school personnel. While paraprofessionals are vital to the education of ELs, they are frequently overlooked in professional development (PD) and in research about PD. Consequently, there has been a dire lack of research regarding the preparation of paraprofessionals of ELs (Abbate-Vaughn, 2007). This study of a PD program for paraprofessionals in one high-incidence EL district begins to address this research gap by providing insights into effective PD for paraprofessionals of ELs.

Literature Review

The role of the paraprofessional in U.S. schools has become increasingly complex, and more paraprofessionals provide ongoing academic supports to students (Wenger, Lubbes, Lazo, Azcarraga, Sharp, & Ernst-Slavitt, 2004). Yet while paraprofessionals may be increasingly important in supporting instruction, research suggests that PD for paraprofessionals has often not prepared them for their growing instructional responsibilities (Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco & Pelsue, 2009; Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010). Little research exists on the roles that paraprofessionals of ELs play in the classroom or about the PD that prepares paraprofessionals to provide instructional support to ELs. Most extant research on paraprofessionals has taken place within the field of special education. For example, Giangreco et al. (2010) conducted a review of research literature on paraprofessionals for students with special needs and found that although paraprofessionals often provided one-on-one instruction to students, they lacked training for this responsibility. This lack of sufficient preparation was supported by the survey research of Carter et al. (2009), who found that paraprofessionals did not always receive preparation they needed for the instructional roles they played.

Most research on paraprofessionals of ELs has been limited to programs that prepare paraprofessionals to become teachers (Wenger et al., 2004). However, in a review of effective programs for ELs, Calderón, Slaven, and Sánchez (2011) highlighted two programs in which paraprofessionals, who had received focused PD and ongoing supervision had a positive influence on the achievement of ELs. In one program, paraprofessionals were effective in accelerating the oral language of ELs (Tong, Lara-Alecio, Irby, Mathes, & Oi-man, 2008). In the second program, paraprofessionals provided effective tutoring in structured phonics to ELs and other students (Brown, Morris, & Fields, 2005). It is worth noting that while both Tong et al. (2008) and Brown et al. (2005) showed that PD for paraprofessionals accompanied by close supervision resulted in effective instruction for ELs, little specific information was provided about the PD. Also, each of these studies focused on PD for very specific purposes. Often, however, paraprofessionals who work with ELs are required to provide a variety of instructional supports within the general education classroom, and little research exists regarding the type of PD that will prepare them to do this effectively.

With regard to preparing paraprofessionals, The National Education Association (2002-2013) recommends ongoing and systematic PD that keeps paraprofessionals current with regard to curriculum and instructional strategies. This ongoing PD will not only better prepare

paraprofessionals to provide instructional supports; PD is also one factor that contributes to paraprofessionals' sense of being respected and valued in their work (Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer (2001). Ensuring that paraprofessionals feel respected and valued will improve their job satisfaction, and thus is likely to increase district retention rates for paraprofessionals (Giangreco, et al., 2001), which provides continuity of instructional supports for ELs. Another factor that contributes to paraprofessionals' job satisfaction is a respectful relationship with teachers (Causton-Theoharis, Giangreco, Doyle & Vadasy, 2007; Law & Eckes, 2010). This respectful relationship is fostered when paraprofessionals clearly understand the roles that teachers expect them to play in the classroom (Lawrence, 2012). The high importance of a respectful work environment suggests that PD to increase the effectiveness of paraprofessionals should also include a component that builds communication between paraprofessionals and teachers.

The PD Program

The PD program described in this paper was funded by a five year National PD grant to prepare all educators to work with ELs. The paraprofessional PD was one component of this larger effort. Until 2013, little PD had been offered to paraprofessionals in the District and none of this PD had focused on supporting instruction for ELs. Initially we planned to provide a one-time PD series to District paraprofessionals with a target of approximately 20-25 paraprofessional completers each year. Our intention was to provide paraprofessionals with introductory training that would be reinforced by District teachers who were participating in ongoing PD in the area of Sheltered English Immersion (SEI). (Based on what we learned during this study, we decided to offer PD each year of the grant, which we discuss in greater detail later in the implications section of this paper.) The first year of PD consisted of four 2.5 hour workshops that were spaced approximately one month apart in order to provide paraprofessionals with time to practice strategies they learned with ELs and to reflect on the effectiveness of these strategies. The PD systematically presented theory and strategies (Causton-Theoharis, et al., 2007) for supporting the instruction of ELs. This PD consisted of the following four core topics:

- The role of the paraprofessional in working with ELs, the academic achievement levels of District ELs (differentiated by grade levels), common acronyms that paraprofessionals hear in the classroom, including ELL, ESL, SEI, World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA), etc.
- Second language acquisition theory and practice, academic language
- Vocabulary strategies, including how to select words to teach
- Assessment of language and content with ELs.

Paraprofessionals were given two assignments to complete between workshops: a reflection journal and a strategy tracker. Both the reflection journal and the strategy trackers were distributed at the beginning of the first workshop. The reflection journals had a printed prompt for each workshop: 1. "What have you learned that you can apply to your work with students?" 2. "How do you think the strategies you learned today will be useful in your work?" 3. "What have you learned about helping your students with academic language?" and 4. "Was the most helpful for you and your students this training? What are you interested in learning more about?" During the final 15-20 minutes of the workshop, the paraprofessionals were encouraged to enter their reflections about the workshop content and its applicability to their

roles as paraprofessionals. The strategy tracker was a matrix that prompted participants to name a strategy they had implemented, describe the strategy and its purpose, and reflect on the effectiveness of this strategy. The PD facilitators encouraged paraprofessionals to implement strategies between workshops, and to use the strategy tracker to record their experiences. Time for sharing the strategy trackers in small groups was built into the start of workshops three through four.

We knew that for the paraprofessional PD to be useful we needed to make teachers aware of what paraprofessionals were learning. We dedicated one of the project's quarterly newsletters to this topic. The District distributed these newsletters throughout its schools, but it is not possible to know how many teachers read these newsletters. Thus, although paraprofessionals learned many new strategies, teachers may have been unaware of what the paraprofessionals had learned.

The District

The paraprofessional PD took place in a high-minority, high-poverty urban district in which 28.2% of students were classified as limited English proficient. The percentage of students living in poverty is 92.4% (as measured by the free and reduced lunch statistic), and 71.9% of the student population comes from homes in which a language other than English is spoken. Most ELs in the district are originally from the Caribbean and speak Spanish as a first language. Since 2002, when the State in which the District is located passed a referendum promoting Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) and dismantling most forms of bilingual education, the District has implemented SEI as the primary instructional program for ELs. The District implemented a variety of PD programs to prepare SEI teachers, which began with Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). During the past four years, the District and the University have collaborated to provide ongoing PD and coursework to prepare all content-area teachers for either ESL licensure or the state-mandated SEI endorsement. No PD had been provided to District paraprofessionals of ELs prior to the paraprofessional PD initiative described in this study. The District recognized the need to prepare paraprofessionals and supported the implementation of this PD and compensated paraprofessionals for the 10 hours of PD contact time.

Methodology

We used qualitative methods to explore the effectiveness of paraprofessional PD, relying primarily on interviews with the paraprofessionals, a focus group with the PD facilitators, and materials that the paraprofessionals submitted. We also used de-identified focus group and observational data provided by the project's external evaluator.

Participants

One hundred and nine paraprofessionals completed the PD (15 secondary, 29 middle, 26 elementary, and 39 early childhood). Of the completers, 100 were female and nine were male.

All paraprofessionals had at least an associate's degree and thus were considered qualified under the guidelines of No Child Left Behind. Fifty seven paraprofessionals submitted their PD assignments for analysis and 12 paraprofessionals were interviewed. Of the interviewees, six worked in early childhood grades, three in middle grades and three in secondary grades. Two interviewees were male and 10 were female. Five of the interviewees had at least a bachelor's degree (three early childhood, one middle and one secondary). Table 1 illustrates the percentages of each grade level of the paraprofessionals who participated in this study.

Table 1.***Participants***

	Total	9-12	5-8	2-4	PK-1
Completers*	109	15	29	26	39
Submitted	57	10 (67%)	14 (48%)	9 (35%)	23 (59%)
<i>Assignments</i>					
Interviews	12	3 (2%)	3 (10%)	0	6 (15%)

Note. *One participant did not provide a grade level.

The six PD facilitators were all licensed teachers in the District and had completed a graduate ESL certificate program offered through the University. This certificate program also prepared teachers to provide PD. Five of the facilitators were female (one early childhood, two elementary, two middle grades) and one was male (secondary grades).

Procedures

With approval from the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) we met with each of the six PD groups during the second workshop session. We explained the study, reviewed informed consent forms, and asked for volunteers. We explained that participants could volunteer in two ways: they could volunteer to be interviewed and/or they could submit their workshop assignments for analysis. Thus, participants could submit their assignments and not participate in the interview or vice-versa. We offered a gift card for participation in the interviews. Sixty-one paraprofessional participants agreed to submit their assignments and 28 participants agreed to participate in interviews.

During the implementation of the PD, the grant's external evaluator observed the workshops, collecting data in note form. The external evaluator also conducted focus groups with 12 paraprofessionals following the final workshop. These data were also collected in note form. The two focus groups lasted approximately 45 minutes each. The evaluator asked participants about their perceptions of the PD, including the content and the format. Six of these participants were elementary grade paraprofessionals and six were employed in middle and secondary grades. To maintain confidentiality these participants were not identified to us.

At the final workshop we collected journal reflections and strategy trackers from 57 paraprofessionals (51 females and six males) who worked in the following grade levels: secondary (N=14), middle (10) elementary (10) and early childhood (23). We emailed the 28 potential interviewees and 14 paraprofessionals responded. We conducted 12 individual interviews during the two weeks immediately following the last workshop. The 30-45 minute interview was structured, yet open-ended, and consisted of 10 questions. Questions one through seven were designed to elicit participants' perceptions regarding the impact of the PD workshops on their current practice in the district, their understandings about their students' needs and English language learning, and the strategies they learned and used. Questions eight and nine asked for additional comments and suggestions for improving the PD. Question 10 encouraged participants to share information about their education backgrounds.

After interviewing 12 of the 14 participants, we decided to not interview the remaining volunteers, who worked in an early childhood setting. We based this decision on our initial reviews of interviews, which indicated we had reached saturation with the six early childhood paraprofessionals. That is, the early childhood interviews were very similar with regard to what participants said they had learned, strategies they had used, and what they would like to learn in future PD. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, and each assignment was transcribed verbatim.

Approximately one month after the final workshop we conducted a focus group with the PD facilitators. The 1.5 hour paraprofessional PD provider focus group protocol was open ended. We asked participants three broad questions: "What worked well? What were the challenges you confronted?" and "What would you change?" This focus group was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

We removed identifying information from each assignment and interview and assigned each participant a number. We then uploaded these de-identified data (12 interview transcripts, one focus group transcript, and transcripts of 57 reflection journals and strategy trackers) into NVivo 10™, a software program used to collect, organize, and analyze qualitative data. With the approval of the University's Institutional Review Board, we then reviewed de-identified focus group and observational data collected by the external evaluator.

We initially coded data into three broad nodes: what participants learned in workshops and how they applied this learning to their work, reflections on working in the district, and reflections on the workshops. We later coded within these nodes to separate data into specific strategies learned, strategies used, reflections and suggestions. The first two authors coded all data. Throughout each step of the coding process, we coded data individually, compared and discussed coding, and then reached consensus.

We triangulated data from the external evaluator and paraprofessional PD facilitator focus groups, as well as anecdotal data from informal observations and conversations with District personnel to support, extend, or contest findings gleaned from the analysis of the paraprofessional data. For example, paraprofessional interview data suggested that participating in the PD made them feel valued. Using the NVivo software we searched for coding in data from the facilitators and from the external evaluator that indicated the importance of the PD to paraprofessionals, and created matrices that showed instances of agreement. We also searched for and included discrepant data, including data from the facilitator focus group that suggested that not all paraprofessionals valued the PD.

Findings

Our analysis yielded five broad findings: 1), it was important to paraprofessionals to be, 2) the roles of paraprofessionals were often unclear and inconsistent, 3) paraprofessionals valued the opportunity for PD, 4) paraprofessionals learned strategies and often tried to use these in their practice, and 5) paraprofessional PD should be expanded and include teachers. We use pseudonyms for the paraprofessionals that we quote. To protect the identity of the small number of male participants, each participant has been given a female pseudonym.

The Importance of Being Valued

We did not explicitly ask participants about their perceptions of the roles they play in the district. Yet, eight of the 12 interviewees discussed their roles and the importance they placed on being valued for the work that they did as well as their concerns about being undervalued.

Three paraprofessionals expressed that their work was supported by the District and they felt valued by the teachers with whom they worked. For example in discussing the District, Ann, a paraprofessional in the secondary grades, wrote about recent changes in the District that support students, "There are more opportunities [for students] to graduate, more programs to [help students] pass the grades, and the school provides all materials for the students." During an interview, Gloria, who worked in the middle school, spoke positively about the teacher with whom she worked: "My teacher has been really very happy with me when I've been able to

better help the students.” Donna, who held a bachelor’s degree in education and worked in early childhood, explained that the teacher with whom she works “asks for my opinion and takes my advice,” something that she clearly viewed as positive.

Other paraprofessionals reported being underutilized by their teachers, which likely diminishes the quality of relationship between paraprofessionals and teachers, and adversely impacts effective practice within the instructional setting (Causton-Theoharis, et al., 2007). For example, although Donna felt valued by her teacher, in her interview she expressed concern that several other paraprofessionals who participated in the workshops with her often felt undervalued. She explained,

I just hope that that information that we were provided, as paras, is taught to the teachers, but also shared with the teachers that the paras have had this training so we are capable of doing some of these things in the classroom instead of just making materials or working on behavior problems... know what we’re doing, let us help. Instead of just saying, “Go make this. Go laminate this. Go clean the table. Go sweep the floor.” Like we’re not just there for that, we’re there to engage with the kids, support the kids.

Across grade levels the underutilization of paraprofessionals seemed to diminish the role they played as instructional support providers. Several paraprofessionals mentioned the disconnect between the role they wanted to play in providing instructional supports and the roles they believed the teachers expected them to play, such as redirecting negative student behavior. For example, Denise, an early childhood paraprofessional, explained, “Because sometimes [as a] para you just feel like you’re not engaged in teaching the children. It’s more like a redirection or assisting the teacher.”

Marta, a secondary paraprofessional, wrote in her reflection journal, “To me it was not beneficial [in the workshops] to include certain approaches as a way of assessment because many times we just do not have access to certain materials.” In the interview Donna explained her perception of implementing strategies in the classroom:

It’s not our responsibility. We kind of do behavior and kind of that. So it’s great information to provide, but I don’t know when we’d be able to actually use all of that information, because sometimes we get, “You’re not the classroom teacher, I am.” So yeah, I think it’s great. We do it when we can, but it can’t be implemented by us all the time. That’s the sad truth.

While paraprofessionals are not the classroom teacher and should not function as classroom teachers, they are more likely able to support classroom instruction when teachers recognize their skills and when they feel that teachers respect their capabilities (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2007).

Role Inconsistency

Seven participants (with 22 references) discussed concerns about their work, with scheduling presenting the greatest concern. Scheduling seemed to interfere with consistency in

the roles the paraprofessionals played in the district, which Lawrence (2012) identified as important to effective work conditions for paraprofessionals. Scheduling conflicts were more apparent in the middle and secondary grades. For example, the middle school schedule resulted in paraprofessionals working with different ELs in different content areas. As Clara, a middle school paraprofessional, explained, “I scatter. So, I’ll be on English for class and then I switch to science, so I don’t see the same student over and over, which is very difficult because I’m continuously modifying my way of teaching or helping.”

As occurs in many systems, District paraprofessionals were sometimes pulled from their duties to work as substitute teachers, which also adversely impacted paraprofessionals’ understanding of their roles and identities within the school setting. During the interview Clara explained,

Substituting is a bit harder, because I go from a role of a para where, you know, [the students] see me as like a buddy... So when I step into that teacher position, it’s hard for the students, well, middle schoolers, to ... put me in that teacher position. They still see me as a para. So it was hard for me to keep the class at a dull roar.

Diane, a middle school paraprofessional, explained that scheduling interferes with paraprofessionals’ opportunities for PD. Diane mentioned the lack of common planning time with teachers as well as missed opportunities for PD that were, in part, due to scheduling:

Paras are not involved in common planning time within this school anyway, where [teachers] talk about—like last week, they talked about WIDA. Okay? Why, you know, why weren’t we told, you know, ‘Maybe you might want to sit in on this.’ Even if I could only go to three quarters of it. Because like, for me, it would be three quarters because I go to lunch and then I do lunch duty.

Professional Development Matters

Several paraprofessionals mentioned that prior to this paraprofessional PD, they had not received training that was aimed at improving their ability to provide academic supports to ELs, and that the opportunity to participate in the PD made them feel valued by the District. As Denise explained, “This [the PD] made it feel like we’re working together as a team and gave ways for us to work together as a team.” And, according to the External Evaluation Report, “The participants in all groups spoke of being engaged, and valued, and encouraged as educators.” The external evaluator also wrote that paraprofessionals approached this PD with enthusiasm and that they were appreciative of the opportunity to participate in PD and be compensated for this participation.

Participation in the PD also seemed to improve paraprofessionals’ understanding of their roles as well as their sense of efficacy. For example, Sara, a paraprofessional in the secondary grades, explained, “[The] first thing I learned was that every time I set foot in a class I should be confident because paraprofessionals are very important to the school.” (A study that was explored in the first workshop showed that a classroom with a paraprofessional is more successful than a small class.) Clara (middle school paraprofessional) felt that participation in the workshop series had increased her confidence. She explained, “I don’t want to say I felt dumb

talking to them [the teachers], but I didn't have the same knowledge or new knowledge to give them when talking with them."

The high degree of participant engagement in the workshops was supported by our informal observations and anecdotal data that were provided by District leadership. For the most part, the PD facilitators stated that paraprofessionals were engaged in learning. The facilitators did report that some paraprofessionals appeared disconnected from the workshops, texting or otherwise using their cell phones and coming to workshops without strategy trackers completed, thus unprepared to participate in discussions about the effectiveness of strategies that they had implemented. The PD facilitators unanimously suggested connecting the certificate of completion and the stipend to the completion of homework as well as participation in each workshop. Interview data from one paraprofessional (PK-1) also indicated that the requirements for the certificate of completion should have been more rigorous. She mentioned that she was consistently prepared and ready to share her materials, but that not everyone else brought assignments to the PD workshops.

Learning and Using Strategies

All 57 participants described the strategies that they learned in the workshops and 15 participants (26%) specifically explained the strategies they subsequently applied to their work with ELs. Table 2 provides an overview of the occurrences of strategies (learned and reportedly used) as evidenced in reflection journals and interviews. The first column shows the major strategies reported: Academic Discourse, Assessment, Pre-teaching, and Vocabulary Development. Subheadings illustrate the specific strategies that participants reported learning and using these strategies are consistent with what was taught and practiced during workshops 2-4. Unless participants explicitly described how they used a strategy, we did not code the strategy as used.

Table 2

The Occurrences of Strategies

Strategies	Strategies Learned	Strategies Used
Academic discourse		
Promoting Higher Order Thinking	7	1
Communicative Strategies	16	1
Scaffolding	12	4
Sentence Frames	7	3
Assessment	8	1
Pre-teaching		
KWL	6	2
Realia	7	4
Visuals	24	14
Vocabulary Development		

Cognates	11	4
Three Tier Words	8	3
Word Parts	3	0

Twenty-five participants reported learning strategies that support the development of academic discourse for ELs. As illustrated in Table 2, the major strategies that participants discussed include the use of Higher Order Thinking questions (7 references), communicative strategies (16 references), scaffolding (12 references), and sentence frames (7 references).

As shown in Table 2, communicative strategies (16 references) and scaffolding (12 references) were the strategies that participants discussed most frequently. For example, Lisa, a paraprofessional who worked in early childhood, wrote in one of her journal reflections,

I learned about strategies such as the Whip Around. This seems to be very effective way to promote oral language. During this activity, children get practice in asking questions and answering them as you go around the group. With repetition and encouragement children are exposed to the model of great oral language.

Consistent with comments from nine other participants, Martiza, an elementary level paraprofessional, demonstrated her understanding of scaffolding in her journal. She wrote, “By using scaffolding, the EL would have the support he/she needs. As EL improves the language, the scaffold is gradually removed.”

Seven participants mentioned the topic of assessment (8 references). Participants reported a general understanding of assessment as well as specific strategies for assessment. For example, Alba, an early childhood paraprofessional, wrote in her journal, “With the use of the formative assessment, teachers can observe if the students are getting the learning targets and be prepared to set new goals for them if they are ready.” Scarlett, another early childhood paraprofessional, wrote in her journal about two activities she learned and planned to use:

One of the activities that I have learned today during class is the Ticket Out. This activity can be used as an assessment to see if the student has learned anything in English. Meaning, is he retaining English? Is he beginning to understand what you're saying? And can he comprehend? Also, I was very interested in Whip Around. This activity ensures that the students listened and will be ready to answer questions or at least tries to answer questions in English if not in Spanish.

Vocabulary strategies were taught in the third workshop. Participants discussed the vocabulary strategies that they learned and used. Twenty-four participants mentioned learning strategies to pre-teach vocabulary, including using KWL charts (6 references), realia (7 references), and visuals (24 references). Among these strategies, using visuals was the most frequently reported as a useful way to assist ELs learning vocabulary. For example, Donna wrote in her reflection journal:

I believe that vocab words and picture dictionaries should be available to all children especially younger students. ELL children can be free to express themselves and refer to

the pictures with the word to really say what they want to say. Emphasis should be put on having picture dictionaries, vocab cards and vocab, words for the week always available.

Fifteen participants reported learning other useful strategies to support vocabulary development. These included using cognates (11 references), differentiating tiered words (8 references), and teaching students how to use word parts (3 references). A quote from Lisa was representative of participants' statements about the importance of using cognates: "Cognate words definitely help a lot to develop and build vocabulary for English language learners, considering that they only need to associate concepts." Lisa continued to explain how having been provided with concrete materials was useful to her and to other paraprofessionals, writing in her reflection journal: "The list that the facilitator provided is just wonderful. It gave us marvelous ideas of how to increase the vocabulary for students."

The third column in Table 2 illustrates the incidence of explicit evidence with regard to strategies that paraprofessionals used at their work. As shown in Table 2, visuals were most frequently used by paraprofessionals. Nine participants mentioned that using visuals helped their students better understand vocabulary. For example, Donna wrote in her reflection journal, "The picture and word were posted and books that week related to the vocab. This way the children get a better understanding of the words...I think it was still very helpful."

Beyond the use of visuals, participants explicitly described few strategies that they had actually implemented with ELs (See Table 2). Although the external evaluator's report stated that paraprofessionals indicated that they had shared materials with their co-workers and the teachers with whom they worked. Findings showing discrepancies between strategies learned and strategies implemented may be explained by several factors. First, we did not specifically ask participants how they used specific strategies with students, a flaw in the interview protocol that we will revise in future studies. Secondly, it may take time for participants to feel sufficiently proficient with newly learned strategies to implement these with students. Third, the school context in which paraprofessionals worked may not have promoted and in some cases could have actually created barriers to paraprofessionals' implementation of instructional strategies.

Expanding Professional Development

The workshops systematically presented theory with strategies so that these strategies could be implemented flexibly as recommended by National Education Association (NEA) (2005), and participants were provided with structure (strategy tracker and reflection journals) to encourage their implementation and practice of strategies between workshops. Yet, 10 hours is a short period of time to learn and to implement instructional strategies. In fact, both paraprofessionals and the paraprofessional PD facilitators discussed the lack of PD time as a barrier. As one PD facilitator explained,

I was constantly playing catch-up ... I even had ...a hard time finding a break. And I know that's not fair to any individual to sit there that long...We had a little bit of an issue with people showing up in a timely manner, mostly I would say because of high school

dismissal time...it's hard to get in there and find parking...There were actually materials that I either skimmed over or I said you can read this on your own, but we don't have time (Focus group).

Another PD facilitator recounted a conversation with a paraprofessional who worked in her building. The facilitator had asked this paraprofessional in her building if the training had been useful. The facilitator explained,

And she said definitely, it definitely was helpful, she liked having training for paras. She would like more time that they could collaborate, more time that they could talk. And I said if there was another session, like a part two, would she be interested and what she would you want? And she would say, "What would I do with this information now? How could I actually implement it into the classroom?" So I think what's next is kind of what was on her mind. We've got all of this information, all these great strategies, all this great assessment tools. So what do I do with it all? And going four months I think is tough, you know. If you kind of pushed it together they may have time to go and practice it and then maybe come back later and kind of share.

These findings are consistent with data from our interviews and de-identified data provided by the external evaluator, who concluded that although the paraprofessionals overwhelmingly found the PD useful, they also expressed the desire for:

...increased time for training, addressing the needs of special needs students, customizing the materials to particular grade levels, having more practical hands on activities and less lecture/material to go through, and providing suggestions on how to co-plan and coordinate with classroom teacher. (External Evaluation Report, 2013)

Donna's statement, "I just hope that that information that we were provided, as paras, is taught to the teachers, but also shared with the teachers that the paras have had this training so we are capable of doing some of these things in the classroom..." illustrates the importance of including teachers in future PD for paraprofessionals.

Implications

This study examined outcomes of a 10 hour PD program for paraprofessionals of ELs. Study findings indicate that paraprofessionals learned many instructional strategies, yet only 25% of paraprofessionals reported using these strategies with ELs. The PD did have an important secondary benefit. Paraprofessionals felt valued by the opportunity to participate in this PD and by the District's willingness to compensate them for participating. Some paraprofessionals indicated they felt valued by teachers for what they knew and what they learned in the PD. Study findings also revealed factors that interfered with paraprofessionals' job satisfaction: their relationship with some teachers and issues with scheduling. Some paraprofessionals felt that their teachers undervalued their skills. Several paraprofessionals indicated that inconsistent scheduling interfered with their effectiveness.

Valuing the Role of Paraprofessional

Paraprofessionals in this study highlighted the importance of being valued for the capabilities and skills they bring to the classroom. This suggests a need for PD for teachers who have been assigned paraprofessionals and time for initial and ongoing meetings between the teacher and the paraprofessional. While some teachers may intuitively know how to effectively communicate with paraprofessionals, districts cannot assume that all teachers are able to do this without PD. A lack of preparation for teachers with paraprofessionals may result in situations similar to those from this study; several paraprofessionals indicated that while they were capable of supporting instruction, they often were expected to clean the classroom or solely handle student discipline.

PD for teachers should include guidelines for working with paraprofessionals, such as those provided by Law and Eckes (2010) via Colorín Colorado. First, a teacher should meet with the paraprofessional to learn about the strengths that she or he brings to the classroom. These strengths should help determine the role that the paraprofessional will play in the classroom. The teacher should also make his or her expectations for classroom routines clear to the paraprofessional and take time to introduce the paraprofessional to students and to other teachers and staff within the school. It is important that teachers also understand specific needs of the paraprofessional. This will enable a teacher to provide job-embedded PD, which is another recommendation of Law and Eckes. We also recommend that as often as possible teachers provide paraprofessionals with their lesson plans ahead of time. In this way, the paraprofessional will understand the lesson objectives, know the lesson structure, and know where she or he fits within this structure.

Having a classroom paraprofessional may be extremely helpful to the classroom teacher. It also adds another layer of responsibility for the teacher that requires an additional time commitment. It is not reasonable to expect that the teacher and the paraprofessional will meet on their own time to discuss roles and to plan the implementation of instruction. Although some planning may well be done on the fly, structured planning time is likely to result in clarity of classroom responsibility and clear classroom routines.

Scheduling

Well-planned, high-quality programs that foster the acquisition of academic language and provide access to grade level content are likely to make a difference in the academic achievement of ELs (National High School Center, 2009). Paraprofessionals are an integral part of these high-quality programs. Yet, scheduling for paraprofessionals of ELs often presents barriers to developing clear instructional programs for ELs. Whereas in special education the presence of a paraprofessional may be specified by a student's individualized education plan (IEP), a binding document, ELs do not have IEPs for language development. And therefore, paraprofessionals of ELs may be called on as substitute teachers or for other tasks. District leaders must carefully consider the implementation of high-quality programs as they engage in the budget process to ensure that they do not assign other tasks to paraprofessionals who were intended to improve the education of ELs by providing instructional supports.

At the middle and secondary levels, paraprofessionals often float between classes or are assigned to a small group of students or an individual student. Scheduling must include time for meetings with multiple teachers and the paraprofessional. Arranging the paraprofessional's schedule so that he or she can attend team planning meetings at the middle school level and as these occur at the secondary level will enable the paraprofessional to understand the goals and the flow of instruction.

Ongoing PD that Includes Teachers

Earlier in this paper we mentioned that we initially planned one 10-hour PD workshop series for each paraprofessional. Our thoughts were that PD content would then be reinforced by teachers who were participating in ongoing SEI PD. Based on our findings we decided to provide 10 hours of PD to paraprofessionals of ELs each year. The content of these PD opportunities will continue to reinforce the theory and practices that District teachers are learning in SEI PD, and also will be determined in part by ongoing feedback from participating paraprofessionals and teachers. We added PD workshops for teachers during the second year of the PD and these, too, will be offered annually. In these workshops teachers will learn about the content of the paraprofessional PD, and based on the guidelines developed by Law and Eckes (2010), teachers will learn how to utilize the strengths of their paraprofessionals, how to establish clear expectations and classroom routines, and how to embed PD for paraprofessionals within their classrooms.

Based on our findings, we encourage districts to consider annual PD for paraprofessionals of ELs. This PD should be consistent with district programs for ELs and with PD offered to teachers. Teachers with paraprofessionals must be included within this PD to better understand the strengths and skills of their paraprofessionals. This understanding will enable teachers to assign paraprofessionals with instructional tasks that are consistent with paraprofessionals' skill level. It will also enable teachers to understand areas in which paraprofessionals need additional PD, which can then be embedded within the classroom. This joint PD will provide teachers and paraprofessionals with structured time, which is often missing from the school day, to begin to discuss instructional roles and responsibilities, a clear indicator of a respectful relationship (Causton-Theoharis, 2007).

Paraprofessionals have the potential to play an important role as one component in a well-planned, high-quality program for ELs. Our research suggests that districts can tap this potential by providing ongoing high quality PD to paraprofessionals and the teachers with whom they work. In addition to increasing instructional skills this PD should foster collaborative and respectful work relationships between paraprofessionals and their teachers. Districts should also consider strategic scheduling that provides time for teachers and paraprofessionals to collaborate and that enables paraprofessionals to provide consistent instructional support to ELs.

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